

Other Viewpoints

Stop addiction to casino money

The demands of crafting a government budget – at the federal, state or local level – often requires some creative thinking and deft management. But still, the public generally expects government revenue generated for a specific purpose to be spent for that purpose.

In Kansas, that isn't always the way it works with our state government, although it should be.

For instance, tax revenue generated for major infrastructure programs has frequently been siphoned off to fund other government needs. That state officials say all the planned projects have been completed or will be completed despite the withdrawals is irrelevant. The taxpayers were told the money was for infrastructure needs.

The Problem Gambling and Addictions Grant Fund is another pot of money that has been hit for general government services recently, although not to the extent the special high-way funds have been tapped.

A legislative budget committee is recommending the state reduce its taking from the addictions fund when it drafts the next state budget. That would be sound policy and a step most people should be able to support.

The Problem Gambling and Addictions Grant Fund is financed through a 2 percent surcharge on legal gambling revenue and is to be used to help people with gambling, alcohol and other addiction problems.

Some of the money has been used to help people with addictions, but much more has been diverted to other purposes. The current budget allocated \$740,000 of the addictions funding for its intended purpose but allocated \$6.5 million of the funds for other services.

A House-Senate budget committee has recommended the next state budget allocate \$4.2 million of the special funds to fighting addictions.

If that recommendation is accepted, some of the addictions funds still would be spent elsewhere, but a jump from \$740,000 to \$4.2 million is a good first step.

Frankly, we don't know just how many problem gamblers are among us, but we've all read or heard stories about people embezzling from their employers or spending the entire household budget to support a gambling addiction. And we do know there is no shortage of alcoholics and people addicted to legal and illegal drugs in our midst.

Problem gambling, drinking and drug use can result in a great deal of physical and mental harm for the individual addict, to say nothing of the accompanying financial problems. Such behavior and all its trappings also wrecks marriages and destroys families.

The state is raising a lot of money, through gambling, to help people fight addictions. We should be able to find sufficient worthwhile programs to support with that funding.

—The Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press

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The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Janene Woodall - Advertising Representative
jwoodall@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
Gary Stewart, Foreman

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Pressmen

Kris McCool, Judy McKnight, Tracy Traxel,
Sheri Arroyo, Mailing

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.



Loss of Senate moderate one to mourn

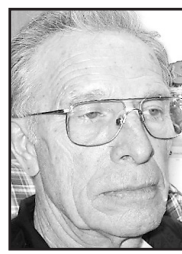
We lost a good man Sunday.

Arlen Specter was one of only a few true moderates in the political arena today. He abandoned his Republican affiliation when he had determined that the party was moving to the extreme right and actually abandoning any pretense at bipartisan cooperation. He then ran on the Democratic ticket for senator in the primary. Understandably, not enough Democrats trusted his realignment and he was defeated.

We have had defections and realignment of party affiliation throughout political history. Few, if any, of those were brought about by big money donations or sudden changes in ideology of those switchers. Most of those individuals were middle-of-the-road moderates who refused to be intimidated by the extremists of their party.

Those of you who bother to read my opinion articles for this paper will remember my latest contribution, pointing out the many shortcomings and failures – my opinion: I don't speak for anyone but myself – under Republican administrations. I also pointed out a few programs that I thought were good, even though they were promoted and administered by Republicans.

I say "even though" – you all know that I am definitely a staunch Democrat. I could remind us all of a few Democrat boondoggles and failures. President Carter's grain embargo in 1980 and President Clinton's North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 are a couple of actions enacted during Democrat leadership. The truth is, both parties have had their glorious and rewarding moments as well as a few dismal failures and ungratifying times.



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

I certainly don't think it would be a benefit to our governmental apparatus to eliminate partisan politics nor to proliferate the field by dividing the nation into a great many separate little political factions and parties. Third- and fourth-party candidates' greatest contribution to the system is forcing the two major parties to address some issues that would never make copy in the coverage of the campaigns. Quite often those issues are not considered important enough to interrupt the cacophony from the extremists of either major party.

Neither party's extremists want to recognize the many bills that are discussed and passed that do not seem to address their partisan or religious agendas. Most of those bills are middle of the road and enjoy bipartisan support, as well as opposition. No one of us should think our candidate or chosen party affiliation is omnipotent and perfect.

I don't believe God has imputed divine perfection and knowledge to any one individual, and certainly not exclusively to either party's spokesmen or leaders. That doesn't mean that religious affiliation, or lack thereof, can't be a part of the vetting process for determining our choice of leaders.

Candidates and spokesmen in both major

parties are accusing their opposition of promoting class warfare and dissension in society.

Truthful and accurate statistical facts do not promote class warfare. They simply point out, distinctly, the disparity in economic and equal rights of all.

It is absolute fact that wealth and power has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. It is absolute fact that poverty has overtaken many more individuals. It is fact that industry has moved to production sights located in foreign countries.

It is fact that our national debt has increased at an alarming rate in the last 12 years. Yes, I said 12 years. The large tax cuts and funding of two wars in the first decade of the 21st century put us into a definite position of deficit spending. It is statistical fact that the tax cuts and military expansion did not prevent the falling economy and loss of jobs.

When we allow the extremists of either party to misconstrue the facts, we will not likely have any solutions that will protect both minorities and majorities of society. There are very few social issues that are absolutely black or white.

We must practice compromise and tolerance we are to survive as a society that provides equal opportunity and protection of all.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

Postal Service scheme hurts Main Street

Small-town retailers face yet another competitive hurdle, thanks to a new deal penned by the United States Postal Service.

No, not the good folks at our post office; this threat comes straight out of Washington.

The Postal Regulatory Commission recently approved a multimillion-dollar deal granting deep discounts to Valassis, one of the nation's largest direct-mail marketers.

This deal will allow national advertisers to force-mail their advertising flyers at steep discounts that no other postal customer can get.

Nationally, this deal will hurt many big-city newspapers across the country at a time when these newspapers are already under extreme economic pressure.

And, in the interest of full disclosure, it could also have a slight negative impact on this newspaper, as national chain-store advertising makes up a small percentage of our annual sales. The fact that our prices for inserting advertising flyers are lower than the discount rates given to Valassis will also limit any negative impact from this deal.

However, the impact on independent Main

Other Opinions

• Rob Hicks
Buffalo Bulletin

Street retailers that cannot qualify for these discounts is far more chilling. National chains will have a distinct advertising advantage over Main Street retailers that just isn't fair.

Don't think this will affect us? Think again.

Stores like the J&B's Meat Market, Beringer's Hardware and the Sports Shoppe work hard to compete against national chains like Walmart, Home Depot and Cabela's. They already provide better customer service, pay city and county taxes and donate to our charities in an effort to distinguish themselves from their national chain competitors.

Now, in an attempt to reconcile its staggering losses, the Postal Service is going to help

national chains compete against our downtown merchants.

And that, quite honestly, just isn't fair.

We certainly understand the dilemma that the Postal Service faces. It has run up losses of more than \$11 billion in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year. But under the best-case scenario, this new scheme with Valassis is only expected to bring in a paltry \$15.6 million in profits during a three-year contract.

At what cost? No one knows, exactly. But the damage to local economies could be far more than the benefit to the Postal Service under these bargain rates.

Bottom line:

It is not the Postal Service's job to choose winners and losers in an already tough economic environment.

Rob Hicks is publisher of the Buffalo Bulletin in Wyoming and principal stockholder of Frontier Newspapers, which owns publications across the West and Midwest.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

